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OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak here today. I represent Soroptimist International (SI) and last July made a statement on its behalf to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1993, held in Geneva on the agenda item relating to the review of consultative arrangements with non-governmental organizations.

I do not intend to restate those remarks as they are available in document E/C.2/1993/NGO.2.

However, since then further concerns have arisen - some from recent preparatory committees, and others from the thorough report of the Secretary-General on the general review of arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations as contained in document E/AC.70/1994/5.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

Suggestions are made in that report on replacing the present category system with new categories based on issues with which the non-governmental organization is involved or on its functions. Should that idea be seriously considered, SI would find it difficult to categorize itself.

SI is a service organization that has a programme area embracing six substantive issues: education, environment, economic and social development, human rights and the status of women, and international goodwill and understanding. How would we be classified?

If the classification is to be based on "function", this again raises a problem since Soroptimist members are involved not only in programmes of awareness and information on global affairs, but also, and more importantly, in advocacy and operational activities. Again, under which function should we be classified?

I believe these concerns are shared by many international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Chairman, we would also like to emphasize Soroptimist's role as an international organization at the United Nations. SI is made up of over 2,000 Soroptimist clubs (each with many members) in 102 countries. These clubs operate at the grass-roots or the community level, with projects and programmes that they themselves initiate depending on community need.

Members from these local clubs convey through the Soroptimist structure their concerns and recommendations for action on issues that affect their daily lives and their communities.

As an international body, SI receives these recommendations and concerns from our 100,000 members in both developing and developed countries and presents them to the appropriate United Nations body in one neat package. Thus, as has been suggested, SI is already forming consensus opinions from four federations that make up its organization.

Another point that needs emphasis - and that has already been mentioned by many international non-governmental organizations - is the stigma attached to all international non-governmental organizations to which the term "Northern" has been applied.

The terms "Northern" and "Southern" <u>can</u> be applied to national organizations, as they represent their area more specifically, but such terminology can hardly be applied to an international organization, since the very term "international" denotes representation of members in many countries. Where an organization's headquarters are located should not be regarded as determining its interests or concerns. You cannot say Soroptimist International is Northern because its headquarters are in England, any more than you could say the same about the United Nations because its Headquarters are in New York.

Non-governmental organizations keep hearing from Governments at United Nations meetings and from the General Assembly in its resolutions about how important they are. The tributes have increased tremendously in the past few

years, but the services have diminished, especially those mentioned in Economic and Social Council resolution 1296. (And I also refer you to paragraph 65 of the report of the Secretary-General (E/AC.70/1994/5).)

SI believes that the United Nations would benefit greatly from opening its doors wider to non-governmental participation - and what this review needs to do is to find ways in which that can be done so as to make participation equitable and effective.

Merely sitting in the presence of government delegations does not give non-governmental organizations any consultative input.

Being asked to get together and have one non-governmental organization speak for all of us diminishes our consultative status.

Not being able to have our statements duplicated and distributed in the official languages of the United Nations also diminishes our consultative status.

We grant that it is physically and logistically impossible to allow everyone to speak - yet how should the speakers be selected? SI believes that the present system under Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 provides the best answer. As to "coalitions", it has long been the practice among non-governmental organizations in consultative status, on their own initiative (and I underline this), to form issue-related committees and caucuses in order to present a unified position. This is not a new concept.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to call your attention to paragraph 73 of the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General which contains several recommendations - recommendations that have been made repeatedly over the past 25 years by members of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO), on whose Board SI now serves.

In particular, I would call attention to subparagraph 73 (c) of the report which calls for the establishment of a coordinating body to harmonize practices relating to the establishment of relationships between non-governmental organizations and various programmes of the United Nations. I would like to add, Mr. Chairman, that this should be at a high level.

We ask that the Open-Ended Working Group give special consideration to these recommendations - namely, those contained in subparagraphs (a) through (h) of the report, with special attention to subparagraph (c) which I mentioned earlier and to subparagraph (d) which calls for the strengthening and upgrading of the United Nations Secretariat's NGO Unit in view of its recent greatly increased workload.

SI thanks you, Mr. Chairman, and looks forward to a thorough and constructive review under your able chairmanship.